

PART II
Common Core State Standards:
Key Features of English Language Arts
We Need to Know
By Ellen Stoltz, Ph.D.

"A human being is not attaining his full height until he is educated."

--Horace Mann (1796-1859)

Understanding the organization of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is the first step in associating what we may already know about English Language Arts (ELA) standards and what we need to know to prepare our students for their future. The CCSS for ELA are divided into three sections by grade levels:

1. A Kindergarten through grade 5 section divided into Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, and Language strands;
2. A grade 6 through grade 12 ELA section;
3. A grade 6 through grade 12 section covering standards for history/social studies, science, and technical subjects.

The CCSS are connected to College and Career Readiness Standards (CCR) from grades Kindergarten through grade 12. The CCR Standards provide the context of why the English Language Arts skills listed in the CCSS are important for students: to apply critical thinking skills with productivity and efficiency in the preparation for both post-secondary education and employment settings.

Students must become skillful in all aspects of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and using language, which serves as the foundation of knowledge and skill across all subject areas. In order to master both the ELA CCSS and the CCR standards, an interdisciplinary approach to teaching ELA is quintessential. For example, world language teachers will utilize non-fiction literature to elicit comparisons between American and Spanish societies. At the elementary grades, teachers will pair fictional literature and non-fiction informational text to ensure students select from a variety of material to support a perspective by citing evidence corroborated by the texts.

The acquisition of the ELA CCSS will be gauged as successful if students can read and respond to increasingly complex informational (non-fiction) texts across a variety of subject areas and topics. As a result, the responsibility for students' mastery of ELA across the disciplines will be distributed among all teachers at all grade levels, regardless of subject matter.